

**MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF AN INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION AFTER-SCHOOL 4-H PROGRAM**

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Master of Education Degree in the
College of Education and Human Service Professions

By

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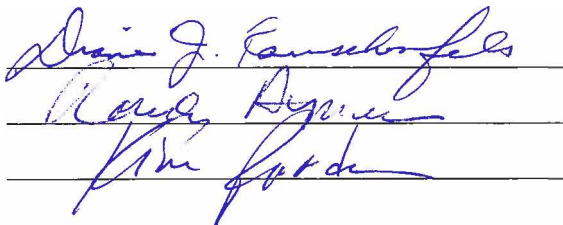
2010

Committee Signatures:

Chair

Member

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The image shows three handwritten signatures in blue ink, each written on a horizontal line. The signatures are cursive and appear to be of the same person or a related group. The first signature is the most legible, followed by the second, and the third is more stylized.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my he-tiger mate for life Mike Scholtz for his patience in putting up with my whining about being overworked and sleepy, his unwavering support and willingness to read what was likely pretty boring stuff from his standpoint. I also want to dedicate this work to my parents Bill and Joyce Coit. They have always been amazingly supportive, loving and encouraging. And despite how I pretend to be embarrassed when they brag about me, I am actually quite pleased about it. In fact, much of the reason I have tried so hard to succeed in both my personal and professional life is to continue to make them proud.

Abstract

A series of seven focus groups were conducted to determine the perceptions of middle school youth on international education via after-school 4-H programming. Twenty-nine students in grades six, seven and eight participated by responding to an identical set of questions designed to encourage group discussion. The participants indicated little familiarity with international education concepts outside of language learning, expressed little interest in learning cross-cultural skills and any type of after-school program that incorporated elements typical of a classroom experience. They expressed a preference for programs that would allow them to focus on interests like sports and the arts. Their perceptions of 4-H indicated little knowledge of the program. However, this unfamiliarity did not carry a negative connotation. These results suggest that educators should ensure after-school programs offer experiences distinctly different from the typical classroom. If focused on international education, programs should provide meaningful opportunities to interact with people from other cultures and explore topics of interest to youth rather than factual information about other countries. These types of programs need to be promoted in a way that aligns with the interests of young people as simply learning cross-cultural skills is not viewed as a need or priority by teens.

Keywords: international education, after-school programming, 4-H, cross-cultural skills

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

We live in a world that is more inter-connected than ever thanks to modern technology but 37% of American students cannot locate China on a map of Asia (Committee for Economic Development, 2006). In addition, the United States is becoming more and more diverse as 20% of the children living here are first or second generation immigrants (Skuzza, 2005). In response to this, it seems logical that youth would be more motivated to focus on cultural diversity issues and take an interest in other cultures, if only to better prepare themselves for a competitive global market. However, this is not the case. Scholars like Mestenhauser (2001) make the point that very few students, even at the college level, seek to learn another language or explore intercultural issues. Why is this the case? Is it due to the types of programs currently available? Would an after-school program focused on international education make a difference or be attractive to youth participants?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the factors that would attract middle-school aged youth to a 4-H after-school program focused on international education. By conducting focus groups that allowed for group interaction, it was possible to gauge participants' initial perceptions of a basic description of the program as well as observe the interactions between participants and how those interactions influenced their views. For this research, focus groups are used as described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007):

Focus groups are a form of group interview, though not in the sense of a backwards and forwards between interviewer and group. Rather the reliance is on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1988), yielding a collective rather than an individual view. (p. 376)

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), focus groups are appropriate when the goal is to gather data on attitudes, values and opinions. Also, they provide greater coverage of issues than would be possible in a survey.

Significance of the Study

In response to concerns that American youth do not possess the skills needed to succeed in a global marketplace and an increasingly diverse America, the proposed solution is more education and opportunities (Ingram & Radhakrishna, 2004).

Works from Mestenhauser (1998) and Yershova, Dejaeghere and Mestenhauser (2000) point out that few youth seem interested in international programs and related courses suggesting the need to evaluate youth's perceptions of international education approaches. The developmental stage of middle-school aged youth may also result in unique perceptions and experiences related to exploring aspects of international education as this audience is typically trying out new identities and preparing for a more adult role in society (Huang, 2001).

Because 4-H is one of the largest youth organizations in the country with nearly seven million members and a variety of programs, Ingram and Radhakrishna (2004) argue that the 4-H program is an ideal springboard to address issues related to global and international education.

Little research is currently available on 4-H efforts to provide international

education opportunities outside of international exchange programs. A new resource for international education has been developed by the University of Minnesota Extension in the form of a curriculum entitled *We Connect*. Before developing a program that will put the new curriculum to use, research on the factors that can attract youth to this type of program is needed.

Setting

The subjects of the study were participants in an after-school University of Minnesota Extension program called The Incredible Exchange. This program is conducted throughout the community and involves a large number of middle school youth in grades six, seven and eight. They were voluntary participants granted permission by a parent or guardian to take part in this research. They represented a stratified sample of middle school aged youth in their community. The focus groups took place in a classroom setting and were facilitated and observed by the researcher. The sessions were audio taped and the facilitator took notes to ensure accurate recording of the participants' verbal and non-verbal responses.

Assumptions

For many years, the researcher has been hooked on traveling and living abroad and in the process has learned a lot about how to interact with people of diverse backgrounds. These skills have served the researcher well and she believes everyone can benefit from an experience that challenges their assumptions and opens their minds to different cultures. For this research project, the researcher wanted to merge her interest in international education with her job as a 4-H Program Coordinator. The plan is to eventually implement after-school programs focused on international education so the

researcher needs to gain insight into student perceptions of such a program to determine how best to proceed. What would attract youth to such a program? What would turn them away? What key themes connect with their concerns and wants in relation to international education? Also, because the program will utilize a newly designed 4-H curriculum, results of this study could be helpful to others interested in developing similar programs.

The researcher's assumptions are many. First, there is the assumption that the results of research with a small group of youth are applicable to other youth. Second, the researcher assumes this research will yield a positive result due to her belief that skills corresponding to international education, namely an international worldview and intercultural communication, are desirable. The third assumption recognized by the researcher is that the responses provided by participants reflect something more than a mere transient state of mind. In other words, the perceptions shared by the focus group participants are deeply held and hold true long-term.

Limitations

Because the study subjects were not selected randomly and this study employs a qualitative approach, the conclusions or themes that rise to the surface may have a narrow application to other learning environments. The results are primarily applicable to less formal after-school settings. The researcher works in the 4-H program so there is the potential of aligning results with positive aspects that reflect well upon the 4-H program. Also, the instructor or facilitator of the program in which the youth are participating is not one of the subjects of this study. Therefore, the facilitator needs to be sure that any inherent biases do not influence the results or conclusions drawn from this research.

Definitions

- International Education—An educational approach focused on strengthening thinking skills and cultural interactions among people (J. Skuza, personal communication, April, 13, 2009). This is also used as a broader term to encompass global education or education about global issues and intercultural education which refers to learning about interactions between people of different cultures (Yershova, DeJaeghere, & Mestenhauser, 2000).
- Culture—According to Geertz (1996), “Culture is more than values, artifacts and institutions. It is a way of thinking, organizing knowledge, reasoning, problem solving, valuing the future, past or present and relating to others” (as cited by Mestenhauser, 1998, p. 76).
- We Connect—Refers to a curriculum offered by University of Minnesota Extension focused on improving the cross-cultural skills of youth.
- The Incredible Exchange—According to the program’s website provided by St. Louis County of Minnesota, this is a program “designed for youth ages 12-15 to volunteer in the community in exchange for an activity of their choice, such as a ski or golf pass” (2011, p. 1). Participants in the program volunteer at various community sites. The program is sponsored by St. Louis County in collaboration with University of Minnesota Extension.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide insight into the perceptions of youth on international education. What do they think of when learning about a program focused on this topic? What might motivate them to participate in the program? Are they

comfortable with the subject matter? What value do they ascribe to the activities and goals of such a program and why? What can be learned from the perceptions of focus group participants that can help educators promote international education programs?

There seems to be a lack of research results specific to after-school international education efforts with middle school students outside the context of a language-learning environment. This study provides educators and youth workers with valuable insight into promoting similar programs, thereby producing significant results when improving the offering of opportunities for youth to learn a valuable life skill.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Related Literature

Introduction

Despite the fact the United States has been at war in Iraq since 2003, a National Geographic Roper Study shows that six in 10 young Americans ages 18 to 24 cannot find Iraq on a map of the Middle East (Clark & Keller, 2006). This information, coupled with the fact that one in five students in grades kindergarten through twelve are the children of immigrants (Fix & Passel, 2003), suggests a need for programs that provide youth with opportunities to learn more about other countries and how to interact with people from other cultures. However, according to Mestenhauser (1998) and Yershova, Dejaeghere and Mestenhauser (2000), few youth seem interested in international programs and related courses.

The purpose of this literature review is to demonstrate the need for further understanding of this perceived lack of interest and the perceptions youth hold about international education efforts. International education in the context of this research is defined as an educational approach focused on strengthening thinking skills and cultural interactions among people (J. Skuza, personal communication, April 13, 2009).

Need for International Education

Perhaps at no point in our past have we been as acutely aware as we are now of being a part of a global society. According to Friedman, today's world is without borders. He states (as cited in Merriman & Nicoletti, 2008), "The future of the United States is tied to the welfare of other countries by economics, the environment, politics, culture, information and technology" (p. 10).

Emphasizing a similar message, Paige says, “We need to look no further than our morning paper to see that our future, and the future of our children, is inextricably linked to the complex challenges of the global community” (as cited in Gibson, Rimmington, & Landwehr-Brown, 2008, p. 1).

This concern is echoed and expanded upon by many professionals including Lansford (2002), who states, “Educating students to navigate among cultures is crucial if they are to be safe and competitive in a global society. There is, however, widespread concern that American students do not know enough about the rest of the world, including its religions, cultures, and languages, to succeed in it” (p. 1).

Statistics demonstrating a lack of cross-cultural skills among young Americans inevitably leads to speculation of this country’s future as this indicates a competitive disadvantage in the global marketplace (Knox & Ruonavaara, 2008).

In addition to these concerns regarding globalization, educators express a need to develop cross-cultural skills for reasons that are closer to home. As mentioned earlier, first and second generation immigrant children account for a substantial portion of America’s youth. Also, according to the Population Reference Bureau (as cited in Ingram & Radhakrishna, 2002):

The cultural landscape of American society has been changing dramatically in the last 25 years and will continue to change. By mid-century no racial/ethnic group in the U.S. will be in the majority. The African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian American populations in this country are increasing at rates faster than the Caucasian population, (p. 1)

In response to these concerns and what some professionals refer to as a crisis of global illiteracy, the proposed solution is more education and opportunities (Ingram & Radhakrishna, 2004).

Skuza (2005) recommends creating learning environments that address the need for culturally relevant and responsive youth development.

Yershova, DeJaeghere and Mestenhauser (2000) state, “Dramatic global changes suggest that we need corresponding changes in the way we think about ourselves and about the world” (p. 39).

International Education

A review of corresponding literature reveals broad trends in relation to international education as well as a focus on language learning as the primary means of providing international education in middle school settings.

To clarify, references to global education are applicable in relation to international education as definitions of the two terms are often closely related and international education may broadly include intercultural and global education (Yershova, DeJaeghere, & Mestenhauser, 2000). For example, global education according to Tye (1999) encompasses learning about problems and issues which cut across national boundaries as well as learning to understand and appreciate our neighbors who have different cultural backgrounds.

Sadker and Sadker (1994) describe global education in the 1980's as focusing on emerging technology, conflict resolution and peace, ecological issues and cultural tolerance. McNergney and Herbert (1998) describe global education in the 1990's as emphasizing the development of greater global awareness or recognition of people's

connections to other countries and peoples of the world (as cited by Merriman & Nicoletti, 2008).

Yershova, DeJaeghere and Mestenhauser (2000) argue that current international education literature “continues to be dominated by the need to do more of the same by acquiring disciplinary content rather than focus on thinking competencies that would help people do the kind of cognitive shifting needed” (p. 39-40). They go on to state that education institutions do not prepare students to live and work in a culturally diverse environment and that teaching intercultural competence and critical thinking skills are extremely important to correct biases, stereotypes and prejudices and produce respect that will result in global understanding and the creation and sharing of knowledge.

In an earlier work, Mestenhauser (1998) makes the point that emphasis placed on international education to ensure future global economic competitiveness is unfortunate as the “more important goals of international education, namely improving quality of life and creating a more peaceful and understanding world may be muffled” (p. 68). As the title of Mestenhauser’s 1998 work indicates, he believes international education was “on the verge” of becoming a major focus in our educational system.

4-H as a Provider of International Education in an After-school Setting

A review of 4-H related literature suggests 4-H could become a lead organization in providing international education opportunities to youth.

4-H is one of the largest youth organizations in the country with nearly seven million members and it can offer curriculum through community clubs, school enrichment programs and after-school programs, making it an ideal springboard to address issues related to global and international education (Ingram & Radhakrishna,

2004).

According to Astroth, “4-H experiences actively engage youth as partners and help them acquire the life skills necessary to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through voluntary participation in planned, experiential, research-based education” (as cited by Ingram & Radhakrishna, 2004, p. 2).

But what is experiential learning? Boyd (2001) provides a detailed explanation, “Experiential learning takes place when a person is involved in an activity, looks back at it critically, determines what was useful or important to remember, and uses this information to perform another activity” (p.1). Boyd further explains that the steps involved are experiencing an activity, sharing the experience by describing what happened, processing it to identify common themes, generalizing to form principles or guidelines that can be used in real life situations, e.g., life skills, and applying what was learned to another situation.

Experiential learning techniques have been studied by Deen, Baily and Park, and demonstrate that through experiential learning, children are better able to gain content knowledge and apply it in real life situations (as cited by Junge, Manglallan, & Raskauskas, 2003, p. 2). Junge, Manglallan, and Raskauskas also cite studies that show improvement in children’s competence, interpersonal skills and ability to empathize due to the cooperative and experiential learning techniques in 4-H after-school programs (2003).

The positive effects of youth involvement in 4-H also appear to be long lasting. Results of a 4-H alumni study conducted by Radhakrishna (2005) conclude, “By participating in 4-H programs and activities, alumni believe that they learned many of the

day-to-day skills, values and responsibilities. It appears the experiences they had in 4-H continue to influence them in later life” (p. 86).

4-H offers a variety of programs and there are 4-H activities across the country with a global focus including international exchanges and opportunities to connect with other cultures locally. The stated goals of these programs are similar to that of other 4-H activities and Etling, Reaman and Sawi (1993) conclude, “It [4-H] can help youth become self-directed, productive, and contributing members of their communities whether local, national, or global” (p. 3).

After-school programs, in general are viewed as helping students develop the skills to not only succeed academically but also improve students’ abilities to get along with others and develop positive attitudes towards their community (Huang, 2001).

A new resource for international education by the University of Minnesota Extension is available in the form of a curriculum entitled *We Connect*. According to one of the authors, Skuza, the curriculum is ideal for an after-school program and is “designed to show youth how they are participants of a global society, inspiring a sense of understanding and confidence in relating and connecting to other people” (J. Skuza, personal communication, April 13, 2009). Skuza further explains the curriculum focuses on the following learning objectives. Youth will develop and refine international thinking skills, demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively in an intercultural context, and possess a sense of self and social responsibility.

Key Components of After-school Programs

Regardless of a program’s focus and specific activities, all after-school programs need to strategically look at their environment, inherent organization and instructional

features and ensure a clear set of goals and strategically designed program and evaluation plans are in place (Huang, 2001).

Knox and Ruonavaara (2008) emphasize the importance of creating meaningful activities. “If experiences of awareness, understanding and appreciation of other cultures and people are vivid enough and meaningfully tied to a youth’s daily life, they will last a lifetime and affect adult decisions and behaviors” (p. 9).

Involving students in a service-learning project that allows them to interact with people from another culture is ideal, according to Pisano and Rust (2007) as this will challenge “existing academic and cultural boundaries through engagement in the community” resulting in a more personal experience that impacts students beyond their time in the program (p. 64). While the Pisano and Rust study involved college students, the idea carries weight with younger people, too, as Rosenthal and Vandell make a similar point in the context of after-school programs (as cited by Huang, 2001).

On a broad level, Lansford (2002) outlines four major approaches to improving global awareness: teaching geography; promoting tolerance and cultural understanding; giving families opportunities to share their cultural heritage with other families and students; and encouraging direct contact between students of different cultures. Some of these approaches could be pursued through connecting learners via on-line communication (Gibson, Rimmington, & Landwehr-Brown, 2008).

In an international education course, Mestenhauser (1998) suggests the introductory focus and expected outcome should be about understanding differences. The next step, according to Mestenhauser should help students “develop cognitive skills that

allow them to understand different cultures and to integrate the differences they observe into what they already know” (p. 71).

A review of the literature suggests that other scholars agree with Mestenhauser’s point. “The basic learning goals of improving intercultural communication are also generally agreed upon,” according to Bennett (1993), encompassing “cultural self-awareness, other-culture awareness, and various skills in intercultural perception and communication” (p. 2).

Paige (1993), emphasizes the need to create a climate that encourages self-discovery and says educators need to prepare learners for stresses that can come from heightened self-awareness. This was not the only potential pitfall evident in literature about international education programs. According to Lansford (2002), research for evaluating successful global education initiatives is “sorely lacking” (p. 1). She also warns that programs can backfire by creating biases in children if they focus on eliminating differences between people and cultures rather than emphasizing the importance of appreciating cultural differences.

Paige (1993) also warns that experiential learning methods that require a considerable degree of personal disclosure should come later in an international education course after less challenging activities have been used and an atmosphere of trust and comfort have been established.

Wider implications of trying to conduct an international education program are also touched upon in the literature. For example, in challenging economic times, there will likely be a lack of available funding for programs (Knox & Ruonavaara, 2008).

More specific to 4-H, Etling, Reaman and Sawi (1993) outline several barriers including expense, lack of a clearly defined project goal, lack of leadership on this issue and a limited number of adults to provide volunteer support. Also, war and recession can negatively affect individuals' attitudes about global citizenship. Understanding these barriers is important in order to respond and adjust programs accordingly. To cut costs, activities that don't require travel are recommended, such as camps, pen pals, sister 4-H clubs, speakers and workshops.

Issues Related to Middle School Aged Youth Participants

Special attention needs to be paid to the middle-school aged youth participating in an international education after-school program as Huang (2001) points out that adolescents in this developmental stage are experiencing many new physical, psychological and social demands. They are also beginning to try on new identities, establish a sense of self-worth and prepare for an adult role in society.

According to Skuza (2005), social segregation is also a prevalent issue among adolescents and multi-cultural settings in schools do not necessarily provide an environment for adolescents to develop interpersonal and intercultural relationships among their peers.

Mestenhauser (1998) warns against "one size fits all education" (p. 76) approaches as this avoids the issue that recipients of such education may not be learning what is intended.

As if responding directly to this point, Skuza says:

The learning environments found in youth programs have an advantage in delivering cultural education, as they can quickly adapt their way of working to

better fit the changing circumstances, strengths, and needs of youth. These programs also offer ideal conditions for youth to explore culture through experiential methods in a relaxed environment where learning can take hold and become a part of their growth and development. (J. Skuza, personal communication, April 13, 2009).

Conclusion

The immense need for addressing our society's trend towards a lack of global knowledge and cultural awareness suggests there would be support available to international education programs that attempt to address this need. It also suggests the problem will require a multi-faceted solution and after-school programs like 4-H may be uniquely positioned to play a role.

Bennet (1993) states, "We should understand why people behave as they normally do in the face of cultural difference, how they are likely to change in response to education and what the ultimate goal is toward which our efforts are expended"(p. 1).

Works from Mestenhauser (1998) and Yershova, Dejaeghere and Mestenhauser (2000) point out that few youth seem interested in international programs and related courses suggesting the need to evaluate youth's perceptions of international education.

A review of the literature reveals little in the way of research on international education with middle-school aged youth outside of the context of language learning. All of this suggests a need for research that focuses on the perceptions of youth regarding an after-school international education program.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand how middle school aged youth perceive international education and what may be attractive to youth in relation to such a program. The research is limited to middle-school aged children as they are the intended audience for a new 4-H curriculum centered on international education. Also, at this stage of development youth are particularly interested in exploring their identity (Huang, 2001). The data collected by this research may reveal language and terms that young people understand and respond to which can help educators learn how best to promote this type of program and what youth would hope to gain from participating. This chapter describes the research participants, the process by which they were selected, the method of gathering data and the way in which the data was analyzed.

Participants and Research Setting

Research participation was focused on boys and girls in grades six, seven and eight. Twenty-nine students were part of a non-probability quota sample to participate in a series of focus group sessions. Because utilizing focus groups to conduct research can be a challenge due to the difficulty in finding participants, much thought was put into the means of selecting research respondents. Non-probability quota sampling was the chosen sampling method as it allowed for the ability to acquire a potentially broad range of responses from the focus group participants while also gathering in-depth data on the research topic. According to Krueger and Casey (2000):

In this form of research, the quality of the study is not dependent on the size of the sample. The intent is to achieve theoretical saturation, which is akin to

redundancy. We are watching for patterns in our interview results, and we will sample until we discover that we have ‘saturated’ the theory or found redundant information, (p. 205-206)

The sample was drawn from the approximately 300 applicants to the Incredible Exchange youth program. The Incredible Exchange program was offered, along with 4-H, by the Southern St. Louis County office of the University of Minnesota Extension. Due to the large number of Incredible Exchange program applicants, ease of access, and their appropriate age, this group represented a convenient pool of potential focus group participants.

The Incredible Exchange program required the completion of an initial application form in order to participate and in this instance the form notified all applicants of the possibility they would be contacted to participate in this research study. The application form also clearly indicated that their participation in the study would be entirely voluntary and their decision of whether or not to participate would not affect their involvement in the Incredible Exchange in any way. Once applications were received, the potential participants were divided into groups by gender and grade to ensure a cross section of the group would be included in the study. Young people were then assigned a number and numbers were randomly selected from a hat. The young people whose numbers were drawn were contacted and asked to participate. Because participants were given a monetary gift upon completion of the focus group sessions, randomly selecting participants was deemed most appropriate to avoid denying someone the opportunity to earn the incentive.

Once potential participants were identified, they were notified by telephone of their eligibility and given details about the research. When a young person and their parent or guardian agreed to participate, they were sent a follow-up letter to confirm the details for the focus group sessions along with consent and assent forms for their review. Shortly before the focus group sessions took place, participants were telephoned again to remind them of the meeting time and location.

A total of seven focus groups took place with three to five participants in each. Out of the 29 participants, 45% were boys and 55% were girls. The focus group sessions were held in conjunction with Incredible Exchange orientation sessions to ensure parents and/or guardians would be in attendance to provide informed and written consent. To protect the identities of the participants, personal information was kept separate from the data collected. A simple coding system was developed to keep identifying information out of the notes and reports created to analyze and report the data.

Prior to conducting this research, the IRB: Human Subjects Committee at the University of Minnesota Duluth conducted an expedited review of this study and granted approval to proceed with the study. The letter detailing approval as well as copies of the Incredible Exchange application, telephone script, follow-up letter, consent and assent forms are included in Appendices A, B, C, D, E and F. The phone script and follow-up letter were partially adapted from templates provided by Krueger and Casey (2000).

Research Design

In order to gain improved understanding of youth perceptions surrounding international education and 4-H, this research adapted a qualitative approach through the use of a series of focus groups. As described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007):

Focus groups are a form of group interview, though not in the sense of a backwards and forwards between interviewer and group. Rather the reliance is on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1988), yielding a collective rather than an individual view. (p. 376)

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), focus groups are appropriate when the goal is to gather data on attitudes, values and opinions. Ideally, they are composed of a small enough sized group to allow individuals to each have the opportunity to share their insights and experiences. Also, this method of research can provide greater in-depth coverage of issues than would be possible in a survey.

Krueger and Casey (2000) concur and state, “A focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (p. 5). They go on to explain that quantitative surveys limit respondent choices, which can be a major disadvantage, and traditional qualitative interviews can be dominated and unduly influenced by the interviewer.

Data Gathering

Because the participants were young people, obtaining informed, written assent from them and consent from a parent or guardian was essential. As focus group attendees arrived at the meeting site, the researcher greeted them and reviewed the consent and assent forms with them individually. They were then escorted to the focus group meeting location and given an opportunity to ask questions before being introduced to the rest of the group and proceeding with the discussion. The sessions lasted about an hour and were held in a classroom. They were moderated by the researcher and audio taped for greater

reporting accuracy. The moderator also took notes to highlight major themes and make observations on non-verbal behavior. To ensure the focus group sessions would allow for a free-flowing exchange of ideas, the focus group questions were designed to ease participants into the conversation as was suggested by Krueger and Casey (2000).

When designing the questions, the following points were considered: how to obtain student's perceptions of international education and 4-H; the sensitivity of discussing programs related to culture and relationships; how to introduce the topic; and how to encourage everyone's involvement in the discussion. To further refine the questions, middle-school students familiar to the researcher were asked to review the questions and provide feedback.

A final script was developed and used consistently with each group to act as a guide for the moderator. It was designed in accordance with suggestions from Krueger and Casey (2000) to include an introductory question, key questions that went to the heart of the research purpose and end questions that provided closure and ensured the moderator had correctly noted the main points and assigned the correct weight to the group's responses.

During the sessions, the participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

- On the paper in front of you, please jot down three things that would interest you in an after-school program and in a moment we'll share them with the group.
- If an after-school program were offered at your school that promoted itself as being about "international education", what do you think it would be like?

- Are you familiar with any types of international programs that have been or are currently being offered?
- What would attract you to this program?
- What would discourage you from participating?
- If a program is part of 4-H, how does this affect what you think about it?
- What words or activities would attract you and other youth to an after-school program focused on building cross-cultural skills?
- So, all things considered, the main thing to keep in mind about this topic is. . .
- Based on our discussion, the main points we've touched upon are ... Does that sound right?
- More group discussions like this will be taking place; do you have any advice on how to improve?

A complete version of the focus group script is included in Appendix G.

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing data for this research began as soon as the first focus group was conducted. This is common to focus group studies according to Krueger and Casey (2000) that make the case for analyzing data while still in the collecting process. They state, "In fact, doing analysis as you go improves data collection" (p. 129). Krueger and Casey contend this allows moderators to adjust their technique based on what has occurred, for example, if one group does little to answer a particular question, the moderator can adapt or focus on this question more with the next group.

Once the focus group sessions were underway, a series of steps were undertaken to begin analyzing the data. Abridged transcriptions of the audiotapes were created and

combined with field notes. A simple coding system that emerged from the data was put in place to protect the identity of the respondents in both the notes and in subsequent reports. Then by reviewing the transcripts the data was grouped into sections relating to each question. From there, the sections were reviewed again and in response to the data new more detailed subsets were created that assisted in identifying emerging themes in relation to each question about the youths' perceptions.

Summary

The themes identified in the data are supported by direct quotes from research participants. They provide insight into the perceptions of youth regarding international education and 4-H and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Results

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the perceptions of youth on international education. To gather this information, a series of focus groups were conducted with youth in grades six, seven and eight during which, the following questions were asked: 1) jot down three things that would interest you in an after-school program; 2) if an after-school program were offered at your school that promoted itself as being about “international education”, what do you think it would be like; 3) are you familiar with any types of international programs that have been or are currently being offered; 4) what would attract you to this program; 5) what would discourage you from participating; 6) if a program is part of 4-H, how does this affect what you think about it; and 7) what words or activities would attract you and other youth to an after-school program focused on building cross-cultural skills. A few additional questions served the purpose of reviewing what had been discussed to ensure the researcher had an accurate grasp on the ideas and statements expressed by the participants.

After the focus groups were conducted, audiotapes of the conversations and notes taken by the researcher during the sessions made up the raw data that was analyzed to identify themes in response to each of the questions. The results of this analysis are presented and summarized in the remainder of this chapter.

Focus Group Parameters

A total of twenty-nine middle school aged youth, 45% boys and 55% girls, from northern Minnesota took part in a series of seven focus groups with a range of three to five participants in each. The researcher moderated each focus group and asked an

identical series of eight questions as well as appropriate follow-up queries and prompts to generate greater discussion among participants. The questions covered five main topics: 1) if youth are familiar with and/or interested in international education programs; 2) what would attract youth to participate in an international themed program; 3) what would discourage youth from participating in an international themed program; 4) what is the familiarity level of youth to the 4-H program and does this have any bearing on their participation in 4-H programs; and 5) what words or approaches would create interest in programs focused on building cross-cultural skills.

Research topic one. Many statements during the focus groups related to the topic of whether youth are familiar with or interested in international education programs. A close look at these related statements reveals some definite trends. In general, “international education” is an unfamiliar term and associated with school or classroom experiences as well as field trips, community cultural events, language classes and foreign exchange programs. The respondents do not want to attend an after-school program that feels “school-like” so describing a program as being about “international education” would carry a negative connotation. If a program was promoted as an international “adventure” and included “fun” activities, many of the respondents would be interested in participating. Focus group participants had few opportunities outside of the classroom to engage in international related activities. Their exposure to cultural learning has typically focused on factual information or language basics and has not involved learning how to interact with people from other cultures.

For example, when asked about their interest in participating in an international education program, one boy responded, “The education part makes people tempted not to

do it. You think education and you think of sitting at a desk.” In another instance, a boy said, “Is this after-school? Education? I probably wouldn’t go to it. Well, unless it was kind of fun.”

The following exchange was typical when the subjects were asked about the types of cultural activities they had experienced. One girl said, “I can’t really think of anything.” To which another girl added, “Like she said, except I take Spanish in school. But that’s it.” A boy then stated, “In social studies we learn about people’s cultures.” A girl then replied, “We had this one thing once and it was through school and we tried different foods and stuff from other cultures.”

As was mentioned, subjects exposed to cultural learning shared an emphasis on factual information or learning a language. For example, one girl said, “My teacher will teach us some Danish and German which is kind of cool because I’d heard guten tag before but didn’t know what that meant.” Another girl then said, “We had a classroom in our school called the Asian center and we would go there once every month and learn about different cultures and what it was like in like Japan and other countries in Asia and then we’d eat Asian foods and play games and stuff.” And a boy replied, “We had a speaker come from somewhere in Africa and she said that when people think of Africa they think of mud huts and grass and stuff and she showed us that it was exactly like here with houses, cars, town halls.”

Research topic two. The topics of most interest when it comes to cultural learning are similar to the focus group subjects’ interests in general like sports, arts, music, food and conversation. Therefore, if a program is going to attract their participation, they would like it to focus on these types of things. For example, one boy

said, “Some kids like sports so maybe learning about different cultures' sports.” Another boy said, “I think it would be kind of cool to learn about what they do for fun or after school.” And another boy stated, “It would be cool to learn like what kind of art things they do. I like that kind of thing, too.”

Interacting with people from another culture was also frequently mentioned as being of interest. One girl said, “Pen pals. That would be actually fun.” And a male interviewee said, “Talking to some people in like Jamaica on Skype.”

The main factors identified by interviewees as influencing their participation in programs are friends, the program's leader or instructor and knowing what the program would include prior to attending a session. This is exhibited in the following statement from one participant, “It depends on who is in it and the people that are going to do it.” One of the male participants said, “I would look into it and tell some friends about it and if they would do it, I would do it.”

Research topic three. The focus group participants repeatedly mentioned factors that would discourage them from participating in an international related after-school program. First and foremost, as demonstrated earlier, they are not interested in a program that involves learning in a typical classroom style. They prefer hands-on, interactive activities in their after-school programs. For example, one boy said, “I wouldn't necessarily want to be in an after-school, school type of thing. Like if it was like games, that would make it better.”

In-depth language learning was also expressed as a turn-off and many youth said their busy schedules make it difficult to join new programs. In response to a question about factors that may discourage their participation, one female interviewee said,

“Learning a language sounds difficult.” Another girl said, “It may just be something that I don't have time for.” And another participant replied, “I might be missing something else like sports or something.”

Research topic four. Another topic of discussion was designed to determine whether youth are familiar with the 4-H program and does their level of familiarity have any bearing on whether they would decide to participate in a 4-H program. Based on their responses, youth are generally unfamiliar with the aim and extent of the program and even those tangentially affected by it through participation in past 4-H events cannot provide an accurate description of the program. However, this lack of knowledge about the program does not affect their decisions about whether to join in an activity. In cases where they are familiar with the program, it may improve their likelihood of participation.

Common misperceptions about 4-H were expressed in the focus groups when youth referred to it as summer camp or a program “for home-school kids or kids that have horses”. These were reinforced as a few youth participating in the focus groups talked about having attended 4-H camps in the past and events focused on riding and grooming horses.

When asked about how being a part of 4-H would affect their desire to be part of an after-school program, one boy who was unfamiliar with 4-H stated, “It all depends on what it happening.” To which, a girl replied, “Yeah, if it was interesting to me and my friends then I’d want to go.” The boy then added, “It [4-H] doesn’t really make a difference.”

In another conversation, two girls agreed that the 4-H moniker would have a positive affect on their likelihood to participate in a program. One girl stated, “I think I would be more interested because I know 4-H and it’s not bad.” Then, another girl replied, “I’ve always thought 4-H seemed interesting so yeah, that would catch my interest a bit.”

Research topic five. When looking at what words or approaches would create interest in programs focused on building cross-cultural skills, a few themes emerge from the data. First, the concept of cross-cultural skills is not clearly understood. For example, one participant said, “I think it maybe means when two cultures are similar or you’re comparing cultures.” Another stated, “I would think it means like, I don’t know if this is right but, communicating with other people from other countries.”

Second, focus group participants do not identify cross-cultural skills as a need unless you plan to live or travel to other countries. This is demonstrated either expressly or can be perceived by the majority of the respondents’ focus on the identified “fun” aspects of learning about other cultures through games, art and sports. One girl stated, “It would be interesting to me because when I grow up I want to travel the world and promote environmental issues and stuff. So learning about different places and people there and stuff would be cool because that would help with that in a way.”

Third, the main words respondents identified as being important to use in promoting this type of program were “activities”, “fun”, “interacting with people” and “club.” One girl said, “I think if it's called a club or something, not a program, that makes it sound more interesting.” Also, using a variety of in-school promotional methods and

providing details on what to expect in the program were consistently mentioned by respondents as necessary in soliciting their interest.

Discussion

The main purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the factors that would attract middle-school aged youth to a 4-H after-school program focused on international education. Based on the results, a number of practical suggestions became apparent. For example, individuals in the middle-school age group seem most attracted to international themed clubs that promise fun, hands-on activities, unique teaching styles, and an opportunity to interact with people from other cultures. This conclusion upholds the importance of creating meaningful activities for youth as Knox and Ruonavaara (2008) stated, “If experiences of awareness, understanding and appreciation of other cultures and people are vivid enough and meaningfully tied to a youth’s daily life, they will last a lifetime and affect adult decisions and behaviors,” (p. 9).

This conclusion also supports the work of Lansford (2002) who outlined major approaches to improving global awareness that include giving students opportunities to share their cultural heritage with other students and encouraging direct contact between students of different cultures.

The factors that most heavily influence how youth choose after-school activities seem to be friends, the subject matter and whether a program is led by someone they like. Also, youth are most likely to be reached through a variety of in-school media and prefer to know many details about a program’s activities prior to taking part.

On a broader level, the data reveal that while educators, economists, politicians and journalists may see a clear need for improved inter-cultural competency among our

youth, the youth themselves do not see these skills as either a necessity or priority. In fact, they are only vaguely aware of this need and express confusion about even the terms surrounding the concept of learning how to communicate with people of other cultures. This conclusion is supported by Mestenhauser (1998) and Yershova, DeJaeghere and Mestenhauser (2000) who point out that few youth seem interested in international programs and related courses.

In the context of this study, international education is defined as an educational approach focused on strengthening thinking skills and cultural interactions among people (J. Skuza, personal communication, April 13, 2009). However, the participants of this study demonstrated a much different view. The students often associated international or cultural learning with in-school experiences like language classes and memorizing factual information about other countries. This is not surprising as Yershova, DeJaeghere and Mestenhauser (2000) make the point that current international education literature “continues to be dominated by the need to do more of the same by acquiring disciplinary content rather than focus on thinking competencies that would help people do the kind of cognitive shifting needed” (p. 39-40).

Conclusions

So how can these observations assist educators in promoting international education programs, specifically educators within 4-H? Well, even though youth may be largely unaware of the 4-H program, the 4-H name does not seem to carry a negative connotation or unfavorably affect a youth’s desire to become involved in a program. In fact, it can be a positive influence on some youth.

After-school programs should be promoted as distinctly different from classroom

activities. They should also provide youth with meaningful opportunities to pursue their own personal interests as a means of creating a connection to the process of learning about other cultures and cross-cultural skills. While educators may want to tout the importance of learning cross-cultural skills to eventually compete in a global marketplace, this viewpoint carries little weight with youth that possess an often-limited worldview and are primarily focused on friends and having fun. Of course, this does not mean middle-school aged youth do not have a desire to learn or interact. Rather, they have many interests competing for their time and attention so it is important to use language they find familiar and attractive.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary**Educational Implications**

While the implications of this study may not be particularly earth-shattering, they shed light on what may be the crux of the issue when it comes to the need for improved cross-cultural skills among American youth. Experts and curriculum in this arena tout applicable theory and statistics and underscore the importance of cross-cultural learning and international education. But how do we convince youth to invest their time in pursuing cross-cultural skills if they do not view this life skill as a need or interest? We do not. Rather, we draw youth into opportunities by appealing to what is familiar to them and create learning experiences that don't rely on factual information and focus on their personal interests to create a connection and sustain their involvement. It is also essential to give them an opportunity to have meaningful interaction with others and practice cross-cultural skills.

It may be typical of educators, both inside and outside of 4-H, to get hung up on following a particular pattern or curriculum and lose sight of the bigger picture. In the context of international-related programming, youth and adults may be tempted to fall back on the familiar as both are likely part of a school system where international themes are limited to learning geography, facts and taking a few introductory language courses. To affect the change desired by experts in the international education field, a shift needs to take place that instead focuses on interaction with people of other cultures and activities that are meaningful and create a desire to explore cultures in greater depth.

The results of this research support this argument and further emphasize the need for change in approaching the way we create international learning opportunities for youth.

Recommendations for Future Research

Conducting this focus group based study was an eye-opening experience as it seemed youth are eager to share their views but rarely asked to do so. Also, the focus group approach seemed particularly effective in gathering opinions on this topic as it was common for youth to offer an immediate off-the-cuff answer to a question and then watch their answer change and evolve over the course of further thought and discussion with peers. It also served as an important reminder of what educators need to evaluate and consider when planning and conducting learning opportunities for youth - mainly to put themselves in the shoes of their participants and try to remember what it is like to be a teenager.

Based on this experience, moderating focus group discussions seems to be not only a learnable skill, but a conversational art and practice definitely improves performance. In addition, experience in conducting this type of study may make it easier to design questions that are best for a group setting and provoke greater discussion between focus group members. In the future, a focus group approach is recommended when gathering opinions and ideas, especially if the topic is something that may be somewhat unfamiliar or challenging to the subjects of the study.

The results of this research indicate that young people are interested in interacting with people from other cultures. With today's many technology advances, what are schools and after-school programs doing to meet this interest and what considerations must be made in pursuing this type of interaction? It also seems as though youth yearn for

opportunities outside of the classroom that allow them to learn in unique ways so what are after-school programs doing to meet this need?

From the perspective of a 4-H educator, it seems that many youth are not familiar with 4-H and possess incorrect pre-conceived notions about the program. This presents an opportunity for further research to determine how 4-H programs and the media may be contributing to this misperception.

Summary

While youth may not perceive cross-cultural skills as a priority, it does not minimize the importance of these skills in today's world. We continue to live in a society that is becoming more and more diverse and inter-connected. Perhaps, as society evolves and changes, views on the necessity of these skills will also change not only in the school systems, but among youth. In the meantime, educators and those working in youth development can make a difference offering international related programs that attract young people by truly connecting with them and their interests.

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Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

*Twin Cities Campus**Human Research Protection Program
Office of the Vice President for Research**D528 Mayo Memorial Building
420 Delaware Street S.E.
MMC 820
Minneapolis, MN 55455**Office: 612-626-5654**Fax: 612-626-6661**E-mail: irb@umn.edu or ihc@umn.edu**Website: <http://research.umn.edu/subjects/>*

February 4, 2010

Valerie A Coit
2291 Hwy. 23
Wrenshall, MN 55797

RE: "Middle School Youth Perceptions of an International Education After-school
4-H Program"
IRB Code Number: 1001P76532

Dear Dr. Coit

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your response to its stipulations. Since this information satisfies the federal criteria for approval at 45CFR46.111 and the requirements set by the IRB, final approval for the project is noted in our files. Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research.

IRB approval of this study includes the consent and assent form dated January 28, 2010 and recruitment materials received January 19, 2010.

The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 48 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

For your records and for grant certification purposes, the approval date for the referenced project is January 25, 2010 and the Assurance of Compliance number is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillete Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003). Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal; approval will expire one year from that date. You will receive a report form two months before the expiration date. If you would like us to send certification of approval

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to a funding agency, please tell us the name and address of your contact person at the agency.

As Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to:

- *Inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects, changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received.
- *Report to the IRB subject complaints and unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others as they occur.
- *Respond to notices for continuing review prior to the study's expiration date.
- *Cooperate with post-approval monitoring activities.

Information on the IRB process is available in the form of a guide for researchers entitled, What Every Researcher Needs to Know, found at <http://www.research.umn.edu/irb/WERNK/index.cfm>

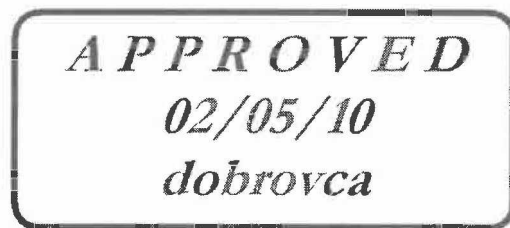
The IRB wishes you success with this research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at 612-626-5654.

We have created a short survey that will only take a couple of minutes to complete. The questions are basic, but will give us guidance on what areas are showing improvement and what areas we need to focus on:

<https://umsurvey.umn.edu/index.php?sid=36122&lang=um>

Sincerely,

Felicia Mroczkowski, CIP
Research Compliance Supervisor
FM/pm
CC: Kim Riordan



Appendix B

*A positive youth development program authorized by
the St. Louis County Board of Commissioners*

APPLICATION - Summer 2010**Deadline: April 15, 2010**

Name: _____ E-mail (if you have one) _____

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

County: _____ Phone Number: _____ Birthdate: __/__/__

Are you _____ Male _____ Female Name of Parent or Guardian: _____

1. What grade are you in? _____ 2. Where do you attend school?: _____

3. Have you ever earned an Exchange Certificate with The Incredible Exchange?
(circle one) YES or NO (If NO, please go on to question # 5)

4. When did you volunteer for The Incredible Exchange? (circle each session): Winter 2006-07

Summer 2007 Winter 2007-08 Summer 2008 Winter 08-09 Summer 2009

Winter 2009-10

5. Will your schedule allow you time to volunteer 3-5 hours a week this summer?
(circle one) YES or NOMail, bring or fax your application to: **THE INCREDIBLE EXCHANGE**Government Services Center - Suite 111
320 W. 2nd Street, Duluth, MN 55802If you need additional copies of this form you can print them from our website at:
www.theincredibleexchange.org

Fax: 733-2888 Phone: 733-2876 or 733-2871

ATTENTION 12 TO 15-YEAR-OLDS!!!**THE INCREDIBLE EXCHANGE™ is an INCREDIBLE YOUTH OPPORTUNITY!**

It gives you a chance to trade your time and energy for fun activities!

Our Summer Session will run from June through August,
with a few sites needing volunteers into the fall.***Applications for THE INCREDIBLE EXCHANGE Summer Session
must reach our office by April 15, 2010.**

There are a limited number of volunteer positions, so a selection process is necessary. The first 250 applicants will receive an invitation to an orientation. Later applicants will be invited if any

openings remain. You must mail, bring, or fax your application to the address above. For additional applications or for more information, visit our website at www.theincredibleexchange.org

WHO CAN BE IN THE INCREDIBLE EXCHANGE?

- ▶ You must be 12-15 years old on April 15, 2010.
- ▶ You must live in Southern St. Louis County.
- ▶ You may do two exchanges, but not in the same year.

HOW TO BECOME A PART OF THE INCREDIBLE EXCHANGE:

- ▶ Fill out the application and return it to our office as soon as possible and not later than the April 15 deadline. We'll send you an email or postcard to let you know when we receive your application.
 - ▶ You must attend a youth orientation session with The Incredible Exchange to choose the Exchange Site where you will volunteer your time. You must also attend an orientation at your Exchange Site to meet your mentor and learn about your tasks there.
 - ▶ You need to have permission from your parent or guardian.
 - ▶ You must set up a volunteer schedule with your Exchange Site.
- You must volunteer between 25 and 50 hours.

If you have additional questions about The Incredible Exchange call 733-2876.

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University of Minnesota Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. For Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations, please call (218) 733-2876.

Please note: the Incredible Exchange and 4-H are both youth development programs offered by the University of Minnesota Extension. Currently, a research project is underway to improve future program efforts. By supplying the above details you may be contacted and given the option to participate in a focus group discussion. If you would like to remain off the list of potential participants, please contact Valerie Coit at 733-2873 or vcoit@umn.edu.



*Appendix C***International Ed. Research Project**
Introductory Letter

Date

Name

Address

Dear (insert name here),

Hello! You have been selected as a potential participant in a research project that will help shape future 4-H after-school programs. Potential participants have been selected randomly from those that submitted applications to take part in the Incredible Exchange program. This letter is intended to serve as a brief introduction and to notify you that you will soon receive a phone call with more details about the study. My name is Valerie Coit, I'm a graduate student conducting this research as a student of the University of Minnesota Duluth's Education Department and an employee of the University of Minnesota Extension Duluth office. I am the main contact person for this research study and will be the one contacting you by phone.

Please note, that participation in the study is completely voluntary and whether you decide to participate in the upcoming focus group discussions will not have any effect on your participation in 4-H or the Incredible Exchange program. Study participants will be given a small amount of compensation for sharing their time and ideas. For convenience, the focus group discussions will take place in conjunction with Incredible Exchange Orientation events.

I hope you will consider participating and that you look forward to hearing more when you receive my call in the near future.

Thanks for your attention,

Valerie Coit

*Appendix D***International Ed. Research Project**

Telephone Script:

Name of person: _____

Phone number: _____

Time called: _____

Better time to call: _____

Hello, this is Valerie Coit. I'm with the University of Minnesota Extension office. I work with the 4-H program and I'm currently working on a new program for middle-schoolers. I got your name from your Incredible Exchange application and I'm wondering if you would be interested in what I'm doing. I want to talk to middle school students about after-school programs. What kinds of activities do you participate in after-school? (It doesn't matter what they say, this is just an opportunity to chat.)

I'm getting together a small group of students to gather input on after-school programs and get an idea of what would appeal to you. There will be about eight students at the meeting and it will take place at your Incredible Exchange Orientation session so it should be convenient for you. It is going to be held on:

Date, Time & Place

Keep in mind, that your participation in this has nothing to do with your ability to participate in the Incredible Exchange program. Is it a separate activity being held at the same event. We will have some food and drinks on hand and you will receive a \$10 Simon Mall gift card as a thank you for giving me your time and ideas. Are you interested in joining us?

No OK. Thanks for your time.

Yes Great. Can I also speak to a parent or guardian to make sure this is okay with them?

No I will need their consent in order for you to participate, is there another time I can call and reach them?

Yes Confirm the identity of the parent/guardian and repeat the above paragraph.

No If the parent says it is not possible, ask to speak to the student again and tell them you appreciate their enthusiasm but it doesn't sound like it's going to work out this time. Thank them for their time and hang up.

Yes Great! I'll be sending a confirmation letter in your child's Incredible Exchange Orientation packet that will provide you with further details about our session. I will also include consent and assent forms for you to look over.

What time were you planning to arrive at the Orientation session? _____

I'm asking because we will be hosting two sessions that evening and I need to arrange a schedule that will best accommodate everyone.

If they ask about having a friend or another sibling participate, explain that the names of potential participants are being randomly selected from the group attending the orientation event.

Thanks for your help and I look forward to meeting you at the Orientation session!

Follow-up needed: _____

*Appendix E***Follow-up Recruitment Letter**

Date
Name
Address

Thank you for accepting my invitation to talk about a new after-school program for middle-school students. The University of Minnesota Extension is creating this program for people like you. We want advice about what you like, what may work and what may not work. It doesn't matter if you've had previous experience with any of our programs. The group will be held:

Date at the Incredible Exchange Orientation session, Time, Place

It will be a small group, about eight people. I've got it all planned out so when you arrive you will proceed to the 4-H table and I'll make sure you get signed up for what is needed for the Incredible Exchange Program. We'll go over the attached consent and assent forms for the research project. Please review these ahead of time for more details on the research and be sure to have a parent or guardian with you when you arrive. We'll have snacks and drinks on hand for our meeting and a \$ 10 Simon Mall gift card for you at the end of the session as a thank you for sharing your time and ideas.

If for some reason you won't be able to join us, please call as soon as possible so I can invite someone else. If you have any questions, give me a call at 733-2873 or email me at vcoit@umn.edu.

I'm looking forward to meeting you, (name of participant') next week. See you then.

Sincerely,

Valerie Coit, 4-H Program Coordinator

*Appendix F***International Ed. Research**
Focus Group Script

Good afternoon and welcome everyone. Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion on international education in after-school programs. I'm Valerie Coit and I am a graduate student conducting a research project in the UMD Education Department. I also work with the University of Minnesota Extension and conduct a variety of programs for young people. I'd like to get more information about how middle-school-aged youth feel about an international ed. based after-school program in order to improve the programs 4-H offers. To be clear, when I say international education, I'm talking about activities focused on learning about other cultures and how to better communicate with people from other cultures.

You were all invited because you are the audience my programs are designed for and I want to tap into your knowledge, experiences and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. I expect that you will have differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said but please be respectful of each other's opinions. I'm tape recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. No names will be included in any reports. Your comments are confidential. Keep in mind that I'm just as interested in negative comments as positive comments.

We have name tents here in front of us. They help me remember names, but they can also help you. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to agree, or disagree, or give an example, feel free to do that. Don't feel like you have to respond to me all the time. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask questions, listen and make sure everyone has a chance to share. I'm interested in hearing from each of you. So if you're talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance. And if you aren't saying much, I may call on you. I just want to make sure I hear from all of you. Feel free to get up and get more refreshments if you would like. Now, let's begin. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Please tell us your name and something you typically enjoy doing after-school. It can be anything and does not have to be school related.

1. On the paper in front of you, please jot down three things that would interest you in an after-school program. (After a few minutes, we'll each share our answers and compare them.) (4 min.)
2. If an after-school program were offered at your school that promoted itself as being about "international education", what do you think it would be like? (8 min.)
3. What would attract you to this program? (5 min.)
4. What would discourage you from participating? (5 min.)

5. If a program is part of 4-H, how does this affect what you think about it? (6 min.)
6. What words or activities would attract you and other youth to an after-school program focused on building cross-cultural skills? (6 min.)
7. So, all things considered, the main thing to keep in mind about this topic is... (5 min.)
8. Based on our discussion, I'd say the main points we've touched upon are . . . (Here the moderator will highlight the main points discussed by the group.) Does that sound right? (4 min.)
9. Last question — I'm going to be conducting more group discussions like this, do you have any advice for me on how to improve? (2 min.)

Thanks again for your participation today. It's been great to hear your insights and opinions and we really appreciate you taking the time to be here and help us design better programs.